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TAIWANESE POSTCOLONIAL IDENTITIES AND ENVIRONMENTALISM  
IN WU MING-YI'S *THE STOLEN BICYCLE*

by

Chihchi Sunny Tsai

Bachelor of Arts  
National Taiwan University, 2018

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts in

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2020

Accepted by:

Jie Guo, Director of Thesis

Gregory Patterson, Reader

Cheryl L. Addy, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family and the place I grew up.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Dr. Jie Guo for her time, kindness and patience spent in each of our discussions and drafts. I appreciate this opportunity to work with her since the very first seminar that I took as a fresh graduate student. I also thank Dr. Gregory Patterson for gladly agreeing to be my reader and for his seminars, which inspired me to look at Taiwanese colonial and authoritarian history. I am grateful for all the help I received through faculty, colleagues and friends at school. And of course, thanks to Kanan and Meow-meow for their support in every aspect of life.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at Taiwanese author Wu Ming-Yi's 吳明益 2015 novel *The Stolen Bicycle* (*Danche shiqie ji* 單車失竊記) and argues that it contests the dichotomous framework assumed in Taiwanese postcolonial theories by revealing contextualized and intertwined complexities. Taiwanese postcolonial literary theorists have been relying on dichotomies, such as perpetrators versus victims and colonizers versus the colonized, to understand Taiwanese colonial and postwar history. These dichotomies produce ways of identarian standoff that are overly simplified by socio-cultural, political or linguistic differences. These dichotomies are useful from a structuralist perspective in literary theories; yet, they are unable to account for the subtle and complex power dynamics among the diverse groups in a postcolonial context. In Chapter One, I argue that *The Stolen Bicycle* provides an alternative to such dichotomies. Several characters in *The Stolen Bicycle* are uninterested in placing themselves in the victimized position and they accept unfortunate events as they are. Acceptance of this sort is often ignored in the postcolonial dichotomous thinking, which tends to construct a clear-cut power stand off between perpetrators and victims. Postcolonial dichotomy is therefore challenged by victims resiliently handling the abuses they experienced rather than launching direct rebellions. In Chapter Two, I argue that *The Stolen Bicycle* makes us reflect on the anthropocentric tendencies in postcolonial studies. Deliberately taking up the environmentalist perspective, this novel considers the subjugation of the non-human during the colonial period, with focus on butterflies and elephants. In Chapter Three, I

argue that the novel's environmentalist perspective suggests symbiosis as an alternative to dichotomy in postcolonial theories. Symbiosis is embodied by the image of the bike-embracing tree toward the end of the novel. The novel proposes a sustainable relationship among human beings and between humans and the environment; this proposal brings postcolonialism beyond its structural, dichotomous and essentialist basis.

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## INTRODUCTION

Published in 2015, *The Stolen Bicycle* (*Danche shiqie ji* 單車失竊記) is a novel written in Mandarin Chinese by Wu Ming-Yi 吳明益 (1971-), a contemporary Taiwanese writer known for his works on ecocriticism and environmentalism. Wu writes essays, short stories and novels and currently teaches in the Department of Sinophone Literatures at the National Dong Hwa University. Other than *The Stolen Bicycle*, one of his most recent novels is *The Man with the Compound Eyes* (*Fuyan ren* 複眼人; hereafter *The Man*), published in 2016. His works have received great recognition both within and outside Taiwan. *The Man with the Compound Eyes* won several prestigious literary awards in Taiwan has been translated to English, French, Turkish and Czech. Book reviews of *The Man* appeared in *The Guardian*, NPR and several academic literary journals in the United States and other English-speaking countries. In 2019, Wu's short story collection *The Illusionist on the Skywalk* (*Tian qiao shang de mo shu shi* 天橋上的魔術師) was adapted into a TV series of the same name in Taiwan. He is also a photographer, and he explores the relations between texts, photographs and nature in the essay collection entitled *Above Flame* (*Fu guang* 浮光). In addition to writing about environmentalism, Wu is also an artist working on the intersectionality of different textualities, such as written texts and visualized images.

*The Stolen Bicycle* is divided into seventeen chapters with a central chronological plotline: the protagonist's father disappeared in 1992 together with his bicycle; since then

the protagonist has become obsessed with collecting antique bicycles. This obsession is secretly tied to his longing for his missing father, which he could not admit to his family and friends. Bicycles evoke the protagonist's memory about his parents, grandparents and siblings. Also, in the process of the search, the protagonist makes connection with other bike collectors through their own stories of bicycles. Most of these stories evoke memories of the Second World War and the postwar periods in Taiwan. Bicycles in this novel are the anchors of the main plotline. They are the markers of time, places and human relationships.

*The Stolen Bicycle* was published in 2015, and two years later it was translated into English by Darryl Sterk. In 2018, the novel was longlisted for the Man Booker International Prize. What was interesting was Wu's controversial nationality that came with this nomination. According to *the Guardian*, the prize's official website changed Wu's nationality from "Taiwan" to "Taiwan, China" after a complaint made by the Chinese Embassy in London. The prize reversed its decision later with a new announcement that "country/ territory" instead of "nationality" would be listed. This came with an awkward statement, added by the spokesperson of the prize: "Taiwan is officially designated a territory rather than a country by the FCO [the Foreign and Commonwealth Office]" (Flood and Kuo). This anecdote points to the long political struggles between the two modern nation states: the People's Republic of China (a.k.a. the government of the Mainland China) and the Republic of China (a.k.a. the government of Taiwan). Since Taiwan left the United Nations in 1971, the PRC has replaced the ROC to represent China. To this day, the PRC has never stopped claiming Taiwan as a part of its territory, while at the same time the ROC operates as a semi-sovereign state. The ROC

functions as an independent democratic government on the domestic level, but its sovereignty is elusive on the international stage. The ROC participates in international meetings, organizations and sport events under an ambiguous, regional marker—Chinese Taipei. “Chinese Taipei” could entail a complex net of political relations at work within and outside Taiwan. The term seems to be an awkward compromise between voices of pro- and anti- Taiwan independence, and between the ROC and the PRC.<sup>1</sup> The Man Booker incident was only another example reflecting this decades-long political dispute. “Taiwan, China” does imply an insensitivity to the political dynamics, but it only replicates the ambiguity of “Chinese Taipei” to change “Taiwan, China” back to “Taiwan,” since Taiwan now stands for Wu’s “country/ territory” of origin instead of his “nationality.” The ROC’s sovereignty remains undefined outwardly, and in the domestic

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<sup>1</sup> Chinese Taipei stands for the ROC in the Olympics. Chinese Taipei was coined in the Nagoya Resolution in 1979 when the PRC was readmitted into the International Olympics Committee after its withdrawal in 1958. The Nagoya Resolution equates the PRC with the status of a sovereign country and allows for the presence of the PRC’s flag in the event. In contrast, the resolution phrases the ROC as “the committee based in Taipei” and therefore names it as “Chinese Taipei Olympics Committee,” and the anthem, flag and emblem of Chinese Taipei have to be approved by the I.O.C. The Nagoya Resolution puts the ROC in a subordinate position compared to the PRC. In addition, interestingly, Catherine K. Lin points out in Taipei Times that “Taiwan” was proposed to represent the ROC several times in major international sports events, but at the time it was unacceptable to the ROC leaders because “Taiwan” does not convey a sense of “Chinese-ness.” Lin states, “The ROC government finally formulated the name ‘Chinese Taipei,’ instead of accepting the offer of ‘Taiwan,’ because ‘Chinese Taipei’ signified an uncertain boundary that could exceed the ROC’s actual territory of control of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu, whenever the ROC government wished to assert it” See Susan Brownell’s and Catherine K. Lin’s articles for more details. The recent coronavirus pandemic reveals the tension between the PRC and the ROC. The World Health Organization allows Taiwan to participate in the emergency meeting under the name of “Taipei.” Since the ROC is not a member of the WHO due to the PRC’s One-China policy, the ROC has already been banned on and off from attending WHO’s meetings. Before the emergency meeting for coronavirus takes place, the ROC and the PRC were also grappling over the official naming of the ROC. The tension reflects the PRC’s insistence on protecting the One-China policy and the ROC’s tendency to identify as Taiwan under President Tsai Ingwen’s government.

domain, the legitimacy of ROC could also be contested.<sup>2</sup> Political struggles as such have shaped Taiwan, as a location<sup>3</sup>, into an arena where identity politics plays out in the everyday life of its residents.

Identity and positionality are the major forces at work in the post-World War II Taiwanese literary debates. In *Writing Taiwan*, Carlos Rojas attempts to summarize Taiwan literature in the following passage:

...a recurrent concern throughout much of twentieth-century Taiwan literature is that of collective identity and cultural genealogy, as both individual authors and entire movements have alternately embraced and positioned themselves in opposition to China and Japan—with the result not only that “Taiwan” is in a supplemental, parasitic position with respect to its more hegemonic neighbors but, furthermore, that its own ambiguous status helps illuminate the constructedness of the naturalized category the nation-state that it mimics. (2)

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<sup>2</sup> The Republic of China, in a sense, connotes a linkage with Kuomintang (aka KMT or the Chinese nationalist party) in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the mainland China, KMT and the ROC has a rich history in political revolutions, World War II, and the Chinese Civil War; in the geographical Taiwan, they are associated with postwar economic revival and authoritarian rule. It is debatable whether the ROC will inevitably imply a connection with a past belonging to the party but not to the land; plus, will the naming of ROC hinder a more localized land-bound perspective that privileges Taiwan over any symbolic connection to “Chinese-ness”? Since 2007, a series of political movements have been dedicated to re-value and devalue Chiang Kai-shek’s importance in history, called *qujianghua* 去蔣化. This includes removing Chiang’s statues in the public space and naming the main plaza at Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall as the Liberty Square instead of the previous one that implies a strong Chiang-isque color. Political perspectives as such would perhaps make the ROC an unstable and contestable name of the government.

<sup>3</sup> I prefer to render Taiwan as flexible to either include or exclude Penghu, Kinmen, Matsu, and other smaller islands. The use of Taiwan here should neither equate with the ROC nor intentionally ignore the minority experiences.

The passage explains exactly the dynamics of *Chinese Taipei*—a term that holds onto Chineseness in opposition to Japan without being subjugated to the geopolitical China; simultaneously, it looks for some political agency through the locational marker Taipei, hesitating to call itself Taiwan. Although it looks like Rojas is far from being sympathetic to the identity struggles as such, he points out the important nexus that Taiwan literature is obsessed with: national identity. In this thesis, I will show how *The Stolen Bicycle* tries to get over this historical obsession. Before explaining my main arguments, I want to look at two Taiwanese literary theorists who respectively lay out and respond to identity politics.

National identity has been repetitively contested in the twentieth-century Taiwanese literary debate. Why does Taiwanese national identity in the past century seem to be fragmentary and incoherent? In the chapter “Postmodern or Postcolonial? An Inquiry into Postwar Taiwanese Literary History,” Chen Fangming<sup>4</sup> 陳芳明 lays out several points of conjecture that could give us some hints to the question. There are two historical periods that highlight a contrasting identitarian framework at work: the issue of the first period is summarized in his subtitle “Postwar or Recolonized?” This points to the early years when the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) took over Taiwan from its previous colonizer Japan after the end of World War II. After retreating from the Mainland China, the KMT continued to rule Taiwan under authoritarianism. Chen comments on this chaotic era in which the residents in Taiwan experienced a drastic change of ruling power, from being Japanized to being Sinicized:

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<sup>4</sup> As a leftist theorist, Chen is attentive to power relation embedded in societies, institutions, and the making of history. He publishes numerous works in the fields of literature, history and politics. He writes canonical works that periodize Taiwanese literature.

when Japanese Pan-Asianism was replaced by Chinese Nationalism as Taiwan's ruling regime, Taiwanese authors' intellectual confusion and the contradictions with which they were faced could not be encompassed by the simple term *postwar*. In reality, what they faced was a *recolonized era*.

Using the term *recolonized era* to replace *postwar era*, it becomes possible to characterize fairly accurately Taiwanese society after 1945. Not only does *recolonized era* allow us to relate back to the *kōminka* period following the War of the Pacific, but, at the same time, it also allows us to look forward to the post-1950 period during which anti-Communist literature reached its height. (32)

Chen's proposed terminological shift indicates his political standpoint that aligns with the *benshengren* 本省人 as opposed to *waishengren* 外省人.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, this observed rupture also points to a supposedly split national identity at the beginning years of Republic of China in Taiwan. A coherent national identity seems to be already impossible

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<sup>5</sup> *Waishengren* refers to the Mainlanders that moved to Taiwan at the end of World War II, especially those that came with the KMT following Chiang's retreat from the Chinese Civil War. *Benshengren*, in comparison, refers to those that have already resided in Taiwan before the arrival of the *waishengren*; these people had previously been immersed in Japanese culture and education. *Waishengren* denotes the people from outside of the province (i.e. the island of Taiwan in this context), whereas *benshengren* denotes those who originate from it. These two terms are the results of a significant social, cultural, political and linguistic split between these two identarian groups in the Taiwanese society in the postwar era. The encounters between these two groups were followed by a violent removal of social and political influences from *benshengren*; the island then underwent decades of the martial law period under Chiang's regime. Understanding this period as "recolonized era" reflects Chen Fangming's sympathy with the *benshengren*'s felt oppression under Chiang's government; in addition, it is also worth acknowledging that the political oppression in Chiang's era was not limited to *benshengren*; rather, a great number of *waishengren* were equally oppressed in the political climate then. These two identarian categories have become quite blurry today, possibly because of intermarriages, decades of liberalization and the structural changes that sets *benshengren* and *waishengren* on a more equal footing of power in terms of politics and culture.

at this point, marked by historical trauma such as the February 28 Incident and decades of intense political surveillance, known as the White Terror, in its wake.<sup>6</sup>

The second period, in the 1970s, was also highlighted by an identitarian tension. There were two heated literary debates: the modernist poetry debates (*Xiandai shi lunzhan* 現代詩論戰), which happened between 1972 and 1973, and subsequently the nativist literature debates (*Xiangtu wenxue lunzhan* 鄉土文學論戰), in 1977. The modernist poets in Taiwan were criticized for parroting Western literary styles and betraying the Chinese tradition. The logic here seems to fall into an orthodox Han-centric perspective that conceptualizes China versus the West as a dichotomous competing relationship. The later nativist literature debates turned into “an ideological standoff between the [nativist] writers and the political rulers” (Chen Fangming 陳芳明, “Postmodern” 39). The nativist writers represent the lower-class people with “embracing the healthy earth” in mind<sup>7</sup>, whereas the opposite voice blamed the nativists for casting a narrow worldview by detaching themselves from Mainland China (Chen Fangming,

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<sup>6</sup> The 228 Incident refers to the large-scale uprising that took place in February 28<sup>th</sup>, 1947 and lasted for several months. The uprising was triggered by a gunshot that was somehow fired by the police while they were checking on a vendor's possession of illegal cigarettes in Taipei. The uprising reflects suppressed social tension between *benshengren* and *waishengren* under the newly arrived ROC government. To put the uprising under control, the ROC government introduced armed force from the mainland, which led to violent clashes between the mainland army and the locals all over Taiwan. Two years after the uprising was poorly handled, the ROC government announced the enactment of the martial law in 1949. During the martial law period from 1949 to 1987, the ROC government conducted intensive political surveillance through censorship and intelligence agency. This period of political abuse is commonly referred to as the White Terror.

<sup>7</sup> “Embracing the healthy earth” (*Yongbao jiankang de dadi* 擁抱健康的大地) is from Wang Tuo's 王拓 essay of the same name.

“Postmodern” 39). This later debate falls into more of a Taiwan-China geopolitical break, and therefore it projects another identitarian dichotomy.

Constructing a coherent national identity in Taiwan can be difficult. Literary debates are fraught with multiple voices and identities, and these voices all strive to represent Taiwan without recognizing that each of them is only a part of the whole. On top of that, Chen’s treatment of Taiwanese literary history predominantly privileges the colonial history:

...contemporary Taiwan literature developed out of specific sociohistorical conditions that are themselves intimately bound up with the entirety of Taiwan’s colonial history. The character of Taiwan’s recent history derives not only from the period of Japanese occupation but also from the political authoritarianism of the postwar period. If we wish to discuss the culturally pluralistic character of contemporary literature, it is necessary to locate that literature within this sociohistorical context. (27)

Chen pinpoints colonialization as the predominant theme of Taiwanese literature. This makes sense because the two colonial and political domination took place one after the other in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Chen emphasizes the importance of taking the sociohistorical context into account because he recognizes political factors under colonization and authoritarianism were often ignored and made invisible under such oppressive regimes. His emphasis on the colonial past is necessary, and at the core of his argument is the impulse to attack the decades-long political injustice. However, we need to question, from today’s standpoint, whether Chen’s critical framework is enough to articulate victimhood. Specifically, the victims here point to those who suffer under colonization



and authoritarianism. We need to ask whether oppression only appears as a clear-cut power standoff between perpetrators and victims. We need to ask whether the perpetrator/ victim dichotomy is enough to explicate subjugations in the past. Does the dichotomous framework help to illustrate the complexities of identities and power dynamics on the ground? If not, what are the alternatives beyond the dichotomous framework?

Identity politics is useful and necessary for political campaigns because representation matters, and votes could create practical changes on policies. Spivak's strategic essentialism points to a similar concept: strategic essentialism entails it is necessary to be represented under one umbrella category that might not speak for on-the-ground distinctions in a political setting (Morris 267). By doing so, political decisions can be made for the greater good, and identities become labels for politics' sake rather than authentic expressions of the realities.

In response to Chen Fangming, in "Being in Common in Postcolonial Taiwan," Chen Chunyen 陳春燕 criticizes Chen Fangming for limiting the theoretical framework of postcolonialism solely to identity politics:

Chen's [Chen Fangming] version of postcolonial Taiwan is predicated primarily on the conception of selfhood as an organic whole. It also privileges the dichotomous logic as the foundation of political thinking. Put differently, his identitarian postcolonialism normalizes the equation between identity as such and politics *qua* relations of power. This essay argues that this theoretical trajectory

can grow into a discursive monolith at the cost of other ways of conceiving of the self in relation to “the political.” (446)

Chen Chunyen’s critique on Chen Fangming points to a broader theoretical problem at large of postcolonialism. Postcolonialism primarily responds to oppression through resistance, and it aims to examine deep-rooted power relations that have been lasting for centuries, from imperialism to colonialism and then to today’s neoliberalism. A continuous investigation into the established power structure should still be championed; yet, it is also important to think about potential theoretical breakthrough of postcolonialism, starting from its configuration of the self and its dichotomous framework. That is, first, how can Taiwanese literary theories move beyond a lasting obsession with the dichotomous relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, between historical perpetrators and victims? Note that the point is not to dismiss the value of postcolonial perspectives per se, but to question whether there are alternatives to a binary power relation. In addition, such binarism can be interpreted as a relation between self and other, and then we might notice that the self in focus in postcolonial theories is not concerned with any other possible *self* beyond human species. Yet, domination and injustice are not confined to the suffering of human beings. How do literature and theories articulate for forms of abuses other than human-to-human, such as animal abuses and environmental exploitation? How does the concern over injustice move beyond a human-centered self and other? I address and analyze these questions in my thesis.

In the same paper that raises questions on identity politics, Chen Chunyen turns to the Taiwanese writer Wuhe's 舞鶴 novel *Remains of Life* (*Yu Sheng* 餘生).<sup>8</sup> She argues that the novel provides an alternative construction of the self, which is different from a conventional postcolonial self, taken by Chen Fangming as a given. My thesis also contributes to contesting identity politics as such and I argue that *The Stolen Bicycle* presents alternatives to the postcolonial dichotomy by breaking the boundaries of essentialist identity categories. The novel presents intertwined identities that cannot be described by a dichotomous framework. The novel deconstructs an essentialist understanding of identity by attending to the complexities of power dynamics. These dynamics reveal how powerless individuals come to terms with their suffering rather than simply position them as the victims. The novel shows that some of the victims accept their suffering as a result of contingency and that they are uninterested in articulating their own suffering in the name of justice. This perspective of acceptance complicates the rigid, essentialist dichotomy of victims versus perpetrators. In addition, eco-criticism provides a critical lens to rethink about the Anthropocentric standpoint taken for granted in identity politics and postcolonial theories. The novel calls attention to indirect and direct human abuses of animals and insects. An Anthropocentric understanding of self that is only concerned with the political is insufficient to explicate abuses as such. I argue that the novel proposes empathy as a possible resolution to avoid reproducing an

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<sup>8</sup> Wuhe's *Remains of Life* was published in 2000. The novel's protagonist is interested in the Musha Incident, which is a historical armed conflict between the Japanese colonizers in Taiwan and an indigenous tribe Seediq. In order to understand the incident's impact on the descendants of Seediq, the protagonist interviews the people living at today's Seediq tribe. The novel is written in a modernist style without conventional sentence or paragraph breaks. The content of the interviews, the narrator's monologue, or other dream-like narratives are intricately intertwined.

Anthropocentric self in the postcolonial theories. I use the concept of symbiosis to explain the novel's call for a collaborative relationship among humans and between humans and the environment. In sum, the thesis examines the intersection between postcolonialism and environmentalism, and it challenges essentialism and centrism by attending to on-the-ground, contextualized complexities.

## CHAPTER 1

### IDENTITARIAN DICHOTOMY

*The Stolen Bicycle* starts with an untitled chapter, which tells the story of a day in a Taiwanese farming village from the third-person perspective. The main character is a little girl who as usual plays hide-and-seek in the rice field with her friends. The normality then turns drastically into a disturbing scene: a loud machinery noise comes near, but the girl falls asleep since she is too focused at the sparkles of a drop of dew. Unaware of how much time has passed, she wakes up only to find the surrounding to be strangely silent. She yells for her friends' names but there is no response. She senses the abnormality around her and starts to panic. She sees a bike parked on the side of the road and hops on top of it to ride straight home. At this point, the sky begins to pour down black rain. This untitled chapter precisely points to the wartime memory shared by many Taiwanese—the aerial bombing in World War II. The black rain, when looked at closely, is actually smog of ashes flying in the air.

Loss is therefore projected at the novel's forefront. A girl in her most familiar surrounding is deprived of all the intimacy that she previously shared with nature and her friends. This abrupt interruption is signified by a blunt silence. Loss strikes a person without notice: to an individual, loss seems to be contingent; it is beyond a person's control. One might ask: is it appropriate to understand wartime suffering as a result of contingency? Is this perspective enough to justify the violence specifically directed by the

top ranked commanders? Before answering these questions, I would like to bring in the scene when the protagonist and his uncle visit the protagonist's mother's childhood home. This is the point when the reader realizes that the girl in the first untitled chapter is actually the protagonist's mother. The protagonist acknowledges from his uncle that his grandfather passed away because he was poisoned by the Japanese for illegally possessing a police bicycle. That exact bicycle is the one that the girl in the first untitled chapter discovers and rides home. Sadly, the scared little girl's unintended mistake leads to her own father's death. After hearing this never-mentioned and almost forgotten family story from his uncle, the protagonist asks:

就按呢過身去囉？

就過身去囉。彼个時代，人死就親像一葩(pah)火化(hua)去全款。

火化去囉。(342)

‘He just died like that?’

‘Just like that. In those days, folks died just like a fire going out.’

*Like a fire going out...*” (329)

How could one take the gloomiest possible tragedy so lightly like this? There is nearly no accusation, blame or resentment implied in the uncle's tone despite the fact that the tragedy directly reveals the mass violence imposed upon the powerless individuals in the colony. The uncles' words reveal that there is a strong tendency to accept things as they are because a person in the position of the colonized is feeble, agentless and speechless. Certainly, these colonized individuals are silenced because they are powerless to

encounter the structural violence; yet, I am interested in how and why a lot of these colonized individuals come to accept and live with the violence rather than accuse, resent and rebel against it. I want to explore the perspective of these colonized individuals, and I argue this perspective challenges the postcolonial dichotomy that understands structural violence only within the perpetrators-versus-victims framework.

Postcolonialism places victims in the opposite position against perpetrators, and the relationship between the two parties is that of domination and subjugation.<sup>9</sup> In a postcolonial context, victims cannot be articulated without being represented through the violence imposed on them by their perpetrators. It almost appears that their suffering has to be theorized in a certain relation to the perpetrators and through an unavoidable dichotomy. Therefore, what is ignored in this discursive trajectory is the way how the colonized individuals make sense of their own suffering. This process of “making sense” could be made visible when we look at the experiences of the colonized.

“Like a fire going out” captures the way how the uncle makes sense of the tragic loss experienced by himself in an oppressive colonial society. “Folks died just like a fire going out” speaks to the internal reasoning that intentional malicious injustice is processed to be a contingent, unpreventable and unstoppable event. This mentality is what I want to bring out in this chapter. I want to shed light on how unfair and unjust loss

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<sup>9</sup> To avoid oversimplification, I want to point out there are some grey areas between theories in postcolonial studies; for example, Spivak speaks of complicity, which points to an ambivalent position that mediates between the two but sides closely to the perpetrators (Morris 245). Likewise, Shi Shu-mei speaks of settler colonialism in Sinophone localities: settler colonialism indicates a three tiered domination structure composed of white colonizers, settler middleman and the local indigenous people (“What” 12). Settler colonialism was prevalent in the global South during the colonial era, and it is a system of structural exploitation in which the middleman’s complicity with colonization is emphasized.

comes to be accepted by victims. By doing so, the way how victims make sense of loss could be envisioned. In addition, the victims will not be constrained in a dualistic trope that always privileges the dichotomy between themselves and the perpetrators. In this chapter, I will pay attention to the protagonist and his family to show how loss stands out as an important theme in the novel and how loss is intertwined with bicycles, memory and history.

The protagonist's family history is closely related to bicycles. In the untitled chapter mentioned above, when insecurity plunges into the girl's heart, there is the bicycle. The bicycle can bring her home. The bicycle is where hope lies, and the entire novel is organized around bicycles that serve as the agents of memory. Both the girl and the novel are in search of something that was lost—something perhaps unnamable or forgotten. The next chapter starts with the following sentences:

我想說的故事，無論如何都得從腳踏車說起。或者準確一點說，從被偷的腳踏車說起。(10)

No matter how I tell it, this story has to start with bicycles. To be more precise, it has to start with stolen bicycles. (7)

The girl's story foreshadows bicycles, and bicycles bring out the protagonist's memory of his father. The protagonist, also serving as the narrator of the novel, grows up in post-war Taipei and in a working-class family. The narrative is set in 2013, which is twenty years after the narrator's father went missing with his bicycle. However, this is not the only bicycle that his family lost. The loss of bicycles has to do with some family dramas: these



dramas reveal awkward relationships between family members, and the dramas usually come from a cluster of emotions—love, guilt, miscommunication and frustration.

The narrator's father owns a tailor shop in Zhonghua Market. As a professional tailor, he is committed to his craft:

對於人身上的技藝，我爸統稱為『工夫』(kang-hu)。我小時候始終以為他講的是『功夫』。他總說，有工夫的人必定經過鍛煉、苦工與咬牙的磨練，才『出師』(tshut-sai)的。(205)

Pa had a word for the art or skill a person carried around with him: *kang-hu*, a homophone in Taiwanese for kung-fu, which is what as a kid I always thought he was saying. He would tell me that people with *kang-hu* have to endure hard training and much gnashing of teeth before, forged and honed, they attain mastery. (200)

A down-to-earth person, the narrator's father is too shy to express his feelings and not good at communication. The family is used to the father's silence, and, overtime, a stagnant relationship between the father and the kids becomes the norm. The narrator's relationship with his father resembles that between his friend Abbas and Abbas' father. Abbas almost never talks to his father, an indigenous Cuo in Taiwan,<sup>10</sup> who attended World War II as a soldier serving in the Japanese army. When Abbas was twenty-seven years old, his father committed suicide in a car. To the narrator and Abbas, their fathers are mysteries, but it does not mean that they have no memory of their fathers. Under the seeming lack of relationships, there are spots of time that linger. The narrator remembers

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<sup>10</sup> Cuo 鄒 is one of the indigenous groups in Taiwan.

his father from the back seat of his bicycle and from touching his sweaty clothes. The only conversation Abbas had with his father is about Abbas' borrowed bicycle. These fragmentary memories connect the two sons with their fathers, and objects—bicycles—become the agents of memory after they lost their fathers.

The narrator's father disappeared with his bike when Zhonghua Market was torn down in 1992. The narrator's family did not know why the father went missing; the narrator's mother was very much in shock at first, but since there was a lack of clue but lasting disappointment spent in wait, the father becomes a taboo topic in the family. The narrator's craze for collecting bicycles comes from his not yet given-up search for his father. Yet, he cannot name it: he only tells people the bike went missing; he never says the father was gone. He can not name it, since loss is tragic and beyond his control. Like the loss encountered by the girl in the beginning chapter, individuals are feeble when facing tragedy.

In this novel, the sense of loss is embodied in the concept of *put-tsuân* 不全. *Put-tsuân* is a term in Taiwanese: *put* means to negate and *tsuân* stands for completeness, fullness and wholeness. As a word, *put-tsuân* denotes a negation of fullness. The protagonist recalls his mother's use of *put-tsuân* to describe people with disabilities:

我問她：『彼个人是按怎？』

她說：『彼是一个五不全的可憐人。』

我問她『五不全』(ngóo-put-tsuân)是什麼意思？她回答，『可比講臭耳聾(tshàu-hinn-lâng)、青盲(tshinn-mî)、欠手、跛跂(pái-kha)、曲痾(khiau-ku，駝背)，就是五不全。』也就是先天，或後天的缺陷者。(253)

‘What’s wrong with that guy?’ I asked.

‘Poor soul!’ she said. ‘He’s one of the five *put-tsuân*’

I asked her what that meant. She replied, ‘Deaf, blind, amputee, lame or hunchbacked.’ The five *put-tsuân* included anyone who suffered from a physical lack, whether congenital or not. (241)

In the mother’s explanation, *put-tsuân* is exemplified by “physical lack.” Yet, lack is not enough to capture what *put-tsuân* denotes. Lack connotes an emptied abyss: abyss evokes a dramatic desire for fulfillment; such desire presumes an agentive, autonomous subject characteristic of modernity. *Put-tsuân* refers to a negation of fullness and therefore connotes incompleteness, which is different from lack. Metaphorically, *put-tsuân* delivers the sense similar to a puzzle with a missing piece, to an unfull circle, to a disabled body. *Put-tsuân* is different from lack in the sense that it is uninterested in agency; *put-tsuân* entails the mentality of leaving the scars and pains as they are when one is stricken by loss. *Put-tsuân* would rather process structural violence through acceptance; in this sense, *put-tsuân* echoes the uncle’s words “like the fire going out” when he recalls his own father’s death. People who live with the concept of *put-tsuân* would rather stay quiet, and they do not long for a final resumption. Yet, *put-tsuân* entails resilience, those who live with it choose to accept loss as it is. *Put-tsuân* does not desire for reconciliation since it

resorts to acceptance. *Put-tsuân* is an alternative to *lack*, and *put-tsuân* treats loss calmly and seriously.

*Put-tsuân* connotes an acceptance that is neither active nor passive. Such acceptance comprehends loss to be contingent rather than to be mediated through perpetrators from the colonial or structural violence. From the perspective of a powerless, meager individual, the idea of *put-tsuân* helps them come to terms with tragic and unjust events. In extreme scenarios where the oppressed individuals cannot have a say in the system, speaking of agency is pointless. Enunciating victimhood presumes an agentive and autonomous subject position where advocating for equality is possible; yet, in a situation where the colonial regime was too powerful, people resorted to *put-tsuân* in order to survive. For those subjugated to the structural violence and do not have a way out, *put-tsuân* enabled them to come to terms with loss caused by malice.

I want to highlight this kind of acceptance embodied in the idea of *put-tsuân*, as a possible way of forming self in addition to the agentive subject assumed in the victimized position in the postcolonial dichotomy. Those who adopt the perspective of *put-tsuân* are often described as victims in the postcolonial dichotomy, with their sufferings being magnified as evidence for injustice. Yet, *The Stolen Bicycle* refuses to describe victims in that way; instead, it tries to shed light on how the victims “make sense of” their loss. In a way, postcolonial dichotomy privileges a “gaze” at the victims in order to articulate for injustice efficiently in a dichotomous power relation between them and the perpetrators; yet, that dichotomy is still fueled by that gaze, and therefore it is still problematic and unsatisfactory. I argue that the idea of *put-tsuân* points to an alternative way to look at the victim-perpetrator dichotomy, since it sheds light on the subjugated position by focusing

on how the subjugated people make sense of the tragedy; without describing violence through dichotomy. I hold that Wu's emphasis on the idea of *put-tsuân* offers a theoretical break-through that suggests an alternative way to look at the oppressive past. Through this alternative way of looking at the past, the perspective of the powerless and oppressed individuals is made visible.

Following the untitled opening chapter, the next chapter goes through all the bicycles that the narrator's family has lost. The narrator's mother's view of history seems to set the tone for the entire novel:

『鐵馬影響著咱一家伙的運命。』我母親常這麼說。我會說，我母親是個新歷史主義者，在她的記憶裡沒有大人物，沒有英雄，沒有轟炸珍珠港。她只記得鐵馬丟掉這等瑣事。(10)

“Iron horses<sup>11</sup> my mother used to say. I would describe my mother as a New Historicist: to her, there are no Great Men, no heroes, no bombing of Pearl Harbor. She only remembers seemingly trivial— but to her fateful—matters like bicycles gone missing. (7)

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<sup>11</sup> “Iron horse” is the literal translation of bikes in Taiwanese, and the narrator prefers the term for its implied traversal meaning between the animate and the inanimate. See the following quotes from the novel:

「特別是鐵馬這個詞太美麗了，它結合了大自然跟人力。你可以想像造物主特意在土地裡留下含鐵的礦石，人們挖出來以後鑄成黑黝黝的碳鋼再打造成一匹馬的樣子。」(12)

“Especially *thih-bé*—iron horse. Such a beautiful expression, evoking both the natural world and human endeavor! Imagine the Creator laying down seams of iron-rich rock for people to mine and cast into carbon steel in the shape of a horse” (9).

The seemingly trivial subjects of concern are all that the mother remembers. Yet, these trivial matters constitute a collection of narratives and memory that are ignored by History, such as written and official histories. Historicism is notorious for its insistence on constructing a coherent, allegedly objective historical truth that allows little to no space for peripheral histories. Contra Historicism, Foucaultian New Historicism abandons coherence and replaces History with discourse. History is therefore exposed as a fictive construct produced out of the matrix of power, institutions and hierarchies. History is then reconstructed by reimagining itself to be an open field that lets in discourses that are not limited to certain authorities. This novel attends to trivial matters as such because it wants to represent discourse by providing a tableau-like portrayal of human and non-human figures.

By revealing the perspective of feeble, mass, agentless individuals, this novel reveals the life philosophy of *put-tsuân* outside of postcolonial dichotomy and identity politics. The perspective of *put-tsuân* accepts adversity, and then acceptance becomes the norm of life. For these numerous individuals appearing on the novel's tableau-like portrayal, resorting to power struggles that have to presume agentive subjects is simply not viable. Here, self and identity cannot be as rigid as they appear to be in the realm of the political; perhaps, in some scenarios, notions of self and identity imply an inability to acquire and attend to on-the-ground complexities. Again, arguing for *put-tsuân* is not denying the usefulness of identity politics in the realm of the politics, but it hopes to be openminded to an alternative form of resistance.

Beyond the protagonist's family history, the novel presents the idea of *put-tsuân* through many other threads of side stories. Bringing together digressions of stories and

numerous characters, from the protagonist to his family and to other people associated with antique bicycles, the entire novel constructs a collection of discourses resembling a tableau. This approach challenges schematic dichotomies and an assumed essentialist self configured in identity politics. Furthermore, since *put-tsuân* does not subscribe to a neat definition of self, an individual's relation to conventional identities is not so absolute. *Put-tsuân* offers a way to blur the boundaries between conventional identities and to explore complexities embedded in the intersections of multiple identities. *Put-tsuân* proves the identitarian categories to be less rigid than they are.

In *The Stolen Bicycle*, several characters challenge conventional identity categories assumed in a dichotomous postcolonial framework. For example, Abbas' father Pasuya is indigenous but works for the Japanese military in World War II. He is once loyal to the Japanese imperial spirit under the *kominka* movement; he not only speaks fluent Japanese but also bonds with his Japanese peers and teachers. In the war zones in Burma, he realizes all soldiers alike are simply pawns of the war. When Pasuya returns to Taiwan after the war, he struggles to survive in the city as a taxi driver. Another character A-hun has been making butterfly collages for a living since she was a girl. Capturing and killing millions of butterflies for their colorful wings is simultaneously a disastrous environmental violation and a crucial source of income for A-hun to make a living as a single mother. Another character Mr. Mu is a KMT soldier from Yunnan. He moves to Taiwan following the defeat of the KMT and is perceived by others as a Mainlander (*waishengren*) in the temporal context at that time. He has a strong attachment to elephant Lin Wang 林旺 during their shared time in the long march, and he is the only person sympathetic, though helpless, to the elephants during the chaotic war time. This

novel portrays figures that are located at the intersections of multiple identity categories: it is difficult to pin any of them down to the status of perpetrator or victim. Identitarian boundaries at once become fictive constructs, which can easily be deconstructed when situations are contextualized and treated in a case by case manner.

To conclude, this chapter argues that *The Stolen Bicycle* challenges identity politics and postcolonial dichotomies by questioning “self” and identitarian boundaries. *The Stolen Bicycle* proposes that the world-view of *put-tsuân* provides an alternative to an essentialist, coherent self, since an awareness of self as such is not relevant and not useful to the perspective of *put-tsuân*. The perspective of *put-tsuân* accepts that loss is contingent and often beyond an individual’s control; it represents the status of the vulnerable under situations when the talk of power, agency and injustice is useless and empty. This angle is crucial because it provides an alternative to the status of victims imagined in postcolonial theories, where victimhood is imagined to be rigid and agentic through thick descriptions of their suffering. That is, under extremely adverse circumstances, victims sometimes have no choice but to accept loss as unavoidable and contingent, and to configure life as inevitably fragmentary—that is— as *put-tsuân*. Moreover, if the idea of *put-tsuân* opens up a perspective where the concept of a coherent, intact “self” is not applicable, then it goes further to prove conventional identitarian categories to be constructs. *Waishengren* versus *benshengren*, the colonizers versus the colonized, humans versus the non-humans are not mutually incompatible categories marked by discrete boundaries. Therefore, *The Stolen Bicycle* endeavors to break away from the long-time obsession in Taiwanese postcolonial literature, where



certain identitarian categories are stagnant. It creates a new possibility that prefers interconnectedness and complexity rather than essentialism and rigidity.

## CHAPTER 2

### INTERSECTING ENVIRONMENTALISM WITH POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES

This chapter looks at the non-human lives that are woven into the stories in *The Stolen Bicycle*. I am interested in how Wu's environmentalist approach contributes to challenging postcolonial binary frameworks that privilege an ideological standoff between human perpetrators and human victims in the colonial history. By telling the stories of the non-human beings and their suffering during man-made wars, this novel highlights the fact that the non-human at large is subjugated to human beings in various ways. Postcolonial theories often call attention to the power relation within human society and contribute greatly to unpacking hidden injustice. However, an environmentalist perspective is not satisfied with this form of Anthropocentrism; environmentalism tries to reveal possible injustices other than those committed by humans to humans. By calling attention to the non-human beings, the novel places itself at the intersection between environmentalism and postcolonialism. The novel introduces a new perspective that holds humans responsible for exploiting natural resources, animals' labor and the non-human lives. Put bluntly, the novel's environmentalist concern highlights the power relation between human and the non-human, which is analogous to that between the colonizers and the colonized. Joint with environmentalism, postcolonialism therefore traverses beyond its prior Anthropocentric focus. In this chapter, I will point out places in *The Stolen Bicycle* where such relations are projected,

emphasized and critiqued. In particular, I focus on butterflies and elephants. They are subjugated to human activities in different ways. I will point out how they are victimized by humans and how theorizing their suffering in the postcolonial framework helps the non-human to occupy a more agentic position.

## **Butterflies**

*The Stolen Bicycle*'s protagonist happens to receive an email that tells a story about a woman named A-hun. In the story, A-hun makes a living by making butterfly collage pictures that are exported to Japan; the story's temporal and spatial setting indicates that she lives in the central Taiwan during the Japanese colonial period. The story draws attention to the flourishing butterfly collage industry in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The butterfly collages are composed of dead butterflies' wings. Producing one collage requires killing immense numbers of butterflies. In the novel, the character A-hun and her father capture butterflies to supply the collage-making business; later when A-hun becomes older, she is promoted to be one of the collage makers, whose job is to detach the wings from the butterflies and color sketched paintings with those wings.

In the Japanese colonial period, these collages were produced in Taiwan and sold to collectors in Japan at high prices. Numerous butterflies in Taiwan were captured and killed simply for their colorful wings. Taiwan was famous for producing butterfly collages because it had rich butterfly habitats with a great number of butterflies as well as rare butterfly species. At the peak of the butterfly collage industry, Taiwan exported these collages to not only Japan but also the Western countries. This booming industry led to a great decline of butterfly population in Taiwan. The previous bio-diversity is therefore destroyed gradually to provide commercial benefits.

The butterfly collage industry enabled capturing and killing butterflies on a massive scale. In the novel, the collages project a strong sense of death through both vision and smell. There is a basket next to every collage maker. The baskets collect the disassembled butterfly bodies that no longer have wings attached. These bodies are left over and eventually thrown away by the end of day. These bodies have a distinctive smell that becomes an important sensory memory that reminds A-hun's daughter of her childhood days when her mother spent hours making collages at home. Through these dead bodies and the peculiar smell, the butterfly collages are analogous to massive killings in the Second World War.

Dead bodies and smell put the butterflies in the position of the victimized as opposed to their human perpetrators. Conventionally, postcolonial theories are concerned with power relations *within* human society, but I argue that this novel places the postcolonial framework at the border of humans and the butterflies; that is, beyond human society and therefore beyond Anthropocentrism. This novel makes visible the power dynamics between human and butterflies.

When environmentalism seems to bring the postcolonial framework outside of its confined attention to human beings, postcolonial theories also help the non-human occupy a subject position by uncovering their subjugation.

Conventionally, the environmentalist perspective highlights the loss of natural resources due to exploitation and abuse caused by human activities. Yet, abuse or exploitation indexes an Anthropocentric view in which the non-human is less agentic and is subject to humans' already made mistakes. The terminologies of abuse and exploitation suggest that nature/ the environment stands at a passive position as opposed

to human beings: butterflies are abused and exploited for the sole benefits of humans' commercial activities. However, this view is pushed back in *The Stolen Bicycle*.

Wu Ming-Yi describes the collective death of butterflies through aestheticized collage pictures that are sold and exchanged for humans' pleasure. The massive deaths of butterflies distantly echo with manslaughter in World War II, and deaths of this kind are beautified, framed and circulated in the form of butterfly collages. Here, the butterfly collages at once become *uncanny*, since they evoke the dead bodies and the smell of corpses in the form of artworks instead of the bloody battlefields. It is this sense of uncanny that makes the collages themselves threatening to the human beings, since the collages evoke humans' deaths. Simultaneously, under Wu's pen, the uncanny collages hold humans as hostages by forcing them witness the crime they committed to both themselves and the butterflies.

Through the portrayal of butterfly collages, it seems that Wu is not satisfied with the vocabulary of abuse or exploitation; he would like to imagine a more agentive position for the butterflies. He would like the butterflies to accuse and rebel against human beings through their exact victimized experience. The visualized massive death of butterflies and the eccentric smell coming from their dead bodies are two sensory elements best representative of the collages. The combination of bodies and smell provides an analogy to humans' deaths; in this way, the butterflies can perhaps symbolically demand for a right to accuse humans of their crimes. The butterfly collages embody an aesthetic representation of victimized experience. The mere presentation of death speaks out to injustice. In this sense, the collages refrain from a conventional

environmentalist perspective that is comfortable with staying in a passive voice. Through the collages, the butterflies secure a more agentive position *vis-à-vis* human beings.

## **Elephants**

Similar to the butterflies, the elephants are another group of animals being victimized by human beings in *The Stolen Bicycle*. In the novel, a detailed Second World War memory that took place in Burma was addressed through two retired soldiers: Pasuya and Mr. Mu. Both of them recall an elephant troop that were used for transporting supplies to frontline Japanese soldiers. The troop was composed of a dozen of elephants led by a local Burmese mahout in service of the Japanese. These elephants were involved in the Second World War because their natural habitats happened to be humans' battlefield. On top of that, because manmade vehicles were difficult to maneuver in the tropical forests, the local elephants came in handy for the humans due to their mobility in their own natural habitats. Once becoming part of the war, the elephants were subject to not only humans but also their weapons. Unexpected gunshots and bombings from the enemies could immediately put these elephants to severe injuries or death. The elephants' habitats were destroyed under the intense gunfire and their lives could be easily lost any moment in the battlefield.

In the novel, these elephants are not freed even after the end of war. They are taken over by the KMT and treated as prizes won from the Japanese army. These elephants are made to walk all across South China to reach important cities on the eastern coast. More than half of these elephants collapse on the road due to the lack of food and rest. The elephants that make it to their destination are put into zoos initially, but at the time that the KMT has to retreat at the end of the Civil War from mainland China, some

of these elephants are shipped to Taiwan as properties of the KMT. Taipei Zoo takes one of these elephants and changed his name to Lin Wang. Lin Wang spends the rest of his life at Taipei, away from his natural habitats and his herd.

The novel's plotline concerning elephants is inspired by the book *War and Lin Wang* (*Zhanzheng yu Lin Wang* 戰爭與林旺).<sup>12</sup> This book is referenced by Wu Ming-Yi at the end of novel, and it is a wartime memoir written by Lin Chunchang 林春長, a Taiwanese soldier serving for the Japanese army during WWII. The book was first written in Japanese, and it was later translated into Mandarin under the arrangement of the writer's son, who believes that the book is an important material to study the war time experiences of Taiwanese soldiers in World War II.

In *War and Lin Wang*, Lin Chunchang chronologically records his time spent in Burma in the service for the Japanese army. The majority part of this memoir is a diary-like portrayal of how the war proceeded, and several sections have detailed descriptions of the Japanese elephant troop and how the writer knew about the elephant Lin Wang. One chapter shows that the writer is sympathetic to the elephants' suffering during the march through South China, and later he feels excited for seeing Lin Wang again at Taipei zoo. The connection between this memoir and *The Stolen Bicycle* blurs the line of fiction, memory and history, and together they highlight the abuse of animals that is easily ignored in the mourning of wartime suffering and sacrifices.

Lin Wang passed away in 2003 at the Taipei Zoo. He was a popular animal star in Taiwan, because of which his death was widely broadcast and agonized by the Taiwanese

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<sup>12</sup> The book *Zhanzheng yu Lin Wang* does not offer an English title. The translation *War and Lin Wang* is mine.

mainstream media. Humans celebrated his life as if he had always been humans' beloved animal friend, but this only sounds ironic considering the fact that Lin Wang was forced into the battlefield in WWII and was made to migrate. His labor was first exploited in the war, he was taken from his natural habitat, and then he was detached from his herd. His existence in the zoo was limited to educational value. He became the zoo's asset and his body was made into a full-size specimen that is still on view at the Taipei Zoo. He was subject to humans in all aspects from the point when the Japanese military arrived in the Burmese forests. Lin Wang was just one out of the entire elephant troop, and none of them was freed from being victimized by humans.

In *the Stolen Bicycle*, the semi-historical war memories about Lin Wang are first laid out through the flashback of several human characters. Yet, in the chapter Limbo, these memories are assembled and presented in a different point of view:

象從夢中醒過來，眼前的森林一片火光。尖銳、前所未聞的咻咻聲穿過林梢，每個悶響都伴隨著幾棵樹著火。煙霧四起，溫暖得嚇人，太陽一樣明亮的金色火球在幾分鐘內不斷升起落下。

象狂亂不安，伸長鼻子，張開耳朵，發出高亢的喇叭聲。長老象圍繞著幼象把牠們推到圓圈的中間。一個被炮彈碎片擊中的馴象師說：「帶著象走另外一條路！另一條路！」(310)

The elephant woke up from a dream to see a forest aflame. A sharp whooshing, never heard before, passed through the foliage. A few trees caught fire with every muffled thud. There was a fog of smoke all around,



frighteningly hot. For several minutes blazing golden balls rose as bright as the sun, only to set moments later.

Agitated, the elephant raised its trunk, flared its ears and trumpeted, a stentorian cry. The mother elephants surrounded the calves, pushing them to the centre of the elephant circle. Hit by shrapnel, a mahout yelled, “Take the elephants the other way! The other way!” (295)

This passage uses the third-person limited point of view to capture the elephant’s subjective feelings without claiming the elephant’s subjecthood. This description is enunciated from an elephant-registered perspective. The reader is able to relate to the elephant through a humanized voice spoken by it. Yet, simultaneously, the voice switches to project a gaze onto the elephant as if readers are suddenly distanced from it. The effect of distancing created through a third-person limited point of view produces an important question: why is it not in first person? I suggest that Wu Ming-Yi would like to leave the elephant’s subjectivity unclear by symbolically setting his authorial control aside. In my view, this way of capturing the elephant’s voice reflects a relatively humble attitude in handling the non-human subjects; this attitude refuses to overstate that humans could possibly understand the non-human. That is, this attitude comes from a reflexive position that attempts to reject Anthropocentrism. This narrative choice would like to imagine a subjective space retained for the elephant.

Anthropocentrism drives humans to treat the non-human unfairly.

Environmentalism helps to see abuse and exploitation produced by human activities. The intersection of environmentalism and postcolonialism provides a trajectory through which injustice could be processed in the non-human registered position as opposed to

human beings. Using the term “victimization” to argue for injustice imposed upon the non-human is important because it points to the severity and the scale of the injustice no less trivial compared to the human beings. Postcolonialism also helps the non-human to occupy the space of the colonized; this space secures a subject position for the non-human and is therefore more agentive compared to an environmentalist point of departure.

## **Dichotomy**

In this section, I return to the question of the dichotomy of the colonizer/ perpetrator and the colonized/ victim, which I’ve been referring to as the postcolonial framework. In the first chapter, I argue that this novel complicates the dichotomy by deconstructing an essentialist imagination of self. Yet, in the second chapter, I use the same dichotomy to explain the relation between human and the non-human. How do these two seemingly opposite trajectories accommodate each other?

To some extent, postcolonial framework is founded on essentialism: there seems to be little overlap between the colonizer and the colonized. This is because postcolonialism privileges dichotomy in order to theorize power relation. Identity politics tends to take such bi-lateral ideological standoff for granted and assumes the standoff as natural and necessary. To critique identity politics, it helps to point out complexities that transgress the presumed standoff. This does not mean I deny the existence of the tension between victims and perpetrators. Identity politics is useful for combating injustice on the political stage and is a powerful tool that just needs to be attended with care. And this is what Chapter One has to offer.

Forming my argument through dichotomy in Chapter Two demonstrates exactly how the binary standoff could be useful for calling out injustice. Through the butterflies and the elephants, *The Stolen Bicycle* draws attention to long-overlooked animal abuse in the hands of human beings. Framing the non-human animals here as being victimized by humans is significant because power does not only saturate within human society but beyond it. In this way, Anthropocentrism is challenged, and perhaps a more egalitarianism relation between human and the non-human animals could be further imagined.

## CHAPTER 3

### BY WAY OF CONCLUSION: SYMBIOSIS

A symbolic scene of coexistence appears in the novel's last chapter. The narrator's friend Abbas sends an email about his bicycle-searching trip in Burma. The trip is inspired by Abbas' father Pasuya's marching route in World War II. According to Pasuya's oral memoir, he secretly buried a bicycle underground somewhere near a military resting site when the war ended. In the email, Abbas tells the narrator that he found the bicycle, but it was discovered in an astounding condition. Abbas found the bicycle wrapped up by the branches and leaves of a tree, referred to as "the bicycle-embracing tree." The narrator sees the image of this tree in the email:

我打開了附檔的圖片檔，正是那棵「抱著腳踏車的樹」，它蓊鬱的枝葉就像一個城市。那腳踏車很小且不分明地被包裹在中央的枝幹附近，如果沒有細看，幾乎就會以為那是樹的一部份。(373-4)

I opened the attached photograph, of the "bicycle-embracing tree". Its leafy branches were like an entire city. The bicycle was tiny, barely discernible, wrapped up near the central trunk. If you didn't look closely, you would almost think it was part of the tree. (358)

This image winds back to the theme "bicycles." Bicycles drive the plotline of the entire novel, and here at the closing point, one of the bicycles resurfaces in such a miraculous

condition. What does the bicycle symbolize in relation to the tree? As the most important thematic link, what do bicycles symbolize throughout the entire novel?

Bicycles are manmade artefacts and serve as the emblems of human memory and history in *The Stolen Bicycle*. The seven “Bike Notes” inserted alongside the main plotline provide information about specific bike models with detailed backdrops of their manufacturing histories. These bike notes are strategically intertwined with the main story because each of the bike models is connected to a specific historical period that the main story touches upon. For example, the first bike note goes through how the Taiwanese bike brand “Lucky” was established in the postwar period. This bike note provides complementary information that echoes with the narrator’s father’s Lucky bike. Therefore, Lucky bikes are not only associated with the narrator’s family memory but also with Taiwanese collective memory of the 1960s. In this novel, bicycles are not only the temporal anchors of the main plotline but also the markers of places and relationships.

The history of bicycles at large manifests the process of modernization in Taiwan. In 1895, Taiwan was ceded to Japan by the Qing government after the First Sino-Japanese War. When Taiwan was under Japanese rule, modern western technology was gradually introduced into Taiwan. Bicycles became one of these modern objects that symbolize advancement and luxury. During World War II, military bikes were produced to facilitate Japanese military maneuvers in Southeast Asia. Bikes were made to accommodate hilly terrains, and they also greatly increase the mobility of the troops compared to the traditional marching. After Japan’s defeat in World War II, Taiwan was taken over by the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT). From 1949 to 1987, the martial law was enforced by the KMT and resulted in decades of authoritarian rule. However, due to

the Cold War and the KMT's siding with the United States, the American financial aid helped Taiwanese economy recover from World War II.<sup>13</sup> The successful economic recovery brings Taiwan to the next stage of industrialization. Industrialization produces a large supply of sweat shop jobs. These jobs were filled by mostly female workers, which created the demand for a convenient commuting vehicle. Bicycles for women were therefore designed and produced locally in Taiwan with a more affordable price compared to the previous imported bikes. In sum, the history of bicycles in 20<sup>th</sup> century Taiwan embodies a series of changes in economy, popular culture and politics.

In the imagery of the bike-embracing tree, Pasuya's bicycle miraculously co-exists with the tree. This state of "symbiosis" relies on a series of collaborative works among multiple nexus in the environment.<sup>14</sup> Abbas imagines the tree's life history in his email to the narrator:

我一直以為那輛巴蘇亞埋的腳踏車，應該還在地下的，但一隻吃了果實的小鳥，在空中拉下了牠的糞便，掉到泥土裡。也許在巴蘇亞挖土埋腳踏車的時候，把那些種子翻攪了一趟。雨季來了，雨季走了，種子發芽了，有些死去，有些活下來。最強壯的那棵，用從泥土裡伸展出來的莖以及枝幹，把埋在土裡的腳踏車往上推。某一年車子被推破

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<sup>13</sup> During the Cold War era, Taiwan was a part of the United States' political frontier in East Asia to block communism. Despite ruling Taiwan as an authoritarian regime, the KMT joins the rank of the United States to support the capitalist world order under the mask of freedom. From 1951 to 1965, the United States provides annual financial aid to the ROC. For more discussions on the ROC's relationship with the United States during the Cold War, see Chen Kuan-hsing's *Asia As Method*.

<sup>14</sup> My use of the concept of symbiosis subscribes to the aspect of interconnectedness and collaboration between two parties. I am aware that the terminology might not be satisfactory, since symbiosis could point more specifically to the state of co-living between two organisms.

了地表，另一年推到一個人高的地方，再十年它的枝葉密密麻麻地攀在車架上，彷彿和車體的鐵合為一體。而後這樹持續把它帶離地面更遠、持續包覆它，就變成這個樣子。(373)

I'd always assumed that that bicycle Pasuya buried would still be underground. But a little fruit-eating bird must have taken a shit, its excrement falling into the mud before Pasuya came to dig a hiding place for his Silverwheel army bike. Maybe Pasuya stirred those seeds, which sprouted after the monsoon came and left. Some died and some survived. The hardiest sprout grew into a stem that broke the surface and, as it thickened into a trunk, pushed the buried bicycle up. One year the bicycle was lifted aboveground. Another year it was raised to the height of a man. A decade passed and branches and leaves crawled all over the frame, as if they were growing into the iron body of the bike. The tree kept on lifting it higher and higher in the air, enveloping it in foliage, until it looked [like] the way it looks today. (357)

Bicycles are artefacts that bear the traces of humans: they attest to the destructive war for which humans once turned the Burmese forests into their battlefield. Yet, the bicycle-embracing tree looks forward to a future in which humans could develop a sustainable relationship with the environment. Concepts like sustainability and symbiosis are founded upon a reflexive attitude that contemplate the Anthropocentric world. The bicycle-embracing tree seems to suggest an alternative to that Anthropocentric perspective; this alternative prefers collaboration over domination, since the bicycle-embracing tree neither privileges human beings nor celebrates an overall success of

nature that simply replicates the logic of centrism. The tree represents the transcendence of the dichotomous standoff through symbiosis. On top of that, this alternative also responds to postcolonial dichotomies by welcoming dialogues and creating possibilities of co-existence. The ideology of a dichotomous standoff has an important place in clarifying and deconstructing power relation, and therefore it still cannot be understated. Yet, on the ideological level, the bicycle-embracing tree provides an ideal referencing point where a sustainable and harmonious future can be imagined and spoken of. In this way, the tree embodies egalitarianism that our society at large can work toward.

It is important to note that *The Stolen Bicycle* does not simply create a rosy place of longing out of naivety; rather, the entire novel goes through the darkest moments of Taiwanese history and collective memory: the Japanese colonization, the Second World War, the February 28 Incident, and the White Terror. Also, from the environmentalist perspective, the novel highlights the exploitation of natural resources and the abuse of non-human lives under the impact of modernization, colonization and industrialization. The novel tries to work through the past by first looking closely at it; only at the closing point does the novel imagine a better place of longing through the image of the bike-embracing tree.

By way of conclusion, I want to lay out the several questions that my thesis asks and tries to answer: first, Taiwanese identities have been theorized through dichotomies—between the colonizers and the colonized as well as between perpetrators and victims—in the literary field informed by postcolonial theory; in response to that, what does *The Stolen Bicycle* offer to undermine those identitarian dichotomies? In the first chapter, I point out the philosophy of *put-tsuân* and several characters that cross the



boundary of multiple conventional identitarian categories. Second, how can such dichotomies become useful to deconstruct Anthropocentrism from an environmentalist perspective? This question is what is at stake especially when it comes to the power relation between human and the non-human. I bring in butterflies and elephants in the second chapter to explicate that dichotomy helps to illustrate an overlooked Anthropocentric oppression that causes great damage to insects and animals. And the last question is: how does *The Stolen Bicycle* look forward to the future in order to work beyond the theoretical dichotomous standoff? Through the imagery of the bicycle-embracing tree, the novel looks forward to an ideal embodiment of the future in which sustainability and a symbiotic relationship comes forth to replace dichotomous encounters. To achieve this goal, reflexive thinking and a thorough overview of the past are fundamental to that ideal.

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